

# Febrile convulsions

Information and advice for parents and carers

## *Paediatrics*

### **What are febrile convulsions?**

A febrile convulsion (also called fever fit or febrile seizure) is when a child has a fit that is caused by a fever. 2 – 4 out of 100 children aged 6 months to 6 years will have a febrile convulsion, and they are most likely to occur in children aged 12 months – 2½ years. 3 out of 10 children who have a febrile convulsion will have another one at some point.

Febrile convulsions can be frightening for parents and carers to see, but are not harmful to the child and usually stop after a few minutes.

Febrile convulsions are not the same as epileptic fits or seizures. Only 1 – 3 out of 100 children who have a febrile convulsion will develop epilepsy. The risk of this is slightly higher in children who have more than one febrile convulsion.

### **What happens during a febrile convulsion?**

During a febrile convulsion a child's body becomes stiff all over, they become unconscious and parts of their body twitch or jerk. Some children also froth at the mouth, have blueness around their lips, have shallow breathing or wet themselves. Their eyes may also roll up.

A febrile convulsion usually lasts for a few minutes. After a convulsion your child may be upset, confused and sleepy for up to 1 hour.

### **What causes a febrile convulsion?**

A febrile convulsion is triggered by a child having a fever, which is usually due to an infection. A fever is a body temperature that is higher than normal. A normal body temperature in children:

- aged 1 year and under is 37.5°C – 37.7°C
- aged 2 – 5 years is 37.0°C – 37.2°C
- aged 5 – 12 years is 36.7°C – 36.8°C

### **How is a febrile convulsion diagnosed?**

Your child's doctor will diagnose a febrile convulsion if your child is aged 6 months – 6 years, they had a high temperature at the time of the convulsion, they are fully conscious 1 hour after the convulsion and they have no other symptoms of a serious illness. The doctor may also ask you to describe what the convulsion looked like and how long it lasted. Some children may need blood tests or urine tests to check for other causes of the convulsion or to find out what has caused their fever.

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### **How is a febrile convulsion treated?**

A febrile convulsion does not need treatment because most convulsions stop after a few minutes and are not harmful. If your child has several convulsions or their convulsion does not stop after a few minutes, they may be given a medication to stop the convulsion.

Some children may need treatment for the cause of their fever, for example if they have an ear infection they may be given antibiotics.

You should also take steps to reduce your child's fever and keep them well hydrated by following the advice below.

### **How to look after your child when they have a fever**

- Keep your child hydrated by offering drinks regularly and encouraging them to drink.
- If they are sweating, remove some of their clothes. If they are shivering, put some more clothes on them.
- If they are uncomfortable, you can give your child some children's paracetamol or ibuprofen to help them feel more comfortable. Please read the instructions on the bottle before giving these and don't exceed the recommended dose.
- Don't sponge your child with water because this can cause them to shiver which can increase their temperature.
- Check on your child regularly while they have a fever, including during the night.
- Keep your child home from nursery or school while they have a fever.

### **What to do when your child has a febrile convulsion**

1. Keep calm and note the time that the convulsion started.
2. Lay your child down flat on the floor or bed and remove any pillows or cushions.
3. Put your child into the recovery position:
  - 1) Lay them on their side.
  - 2) Tilt their head back to keep their airway open.
  - 3) Position their arms and legs to stop them rolling over.

It may be difficult to put them in the recovery position because of their movements during the convulsion. If it is, wait until the convulsion has stopped and then put them in the recovery position.
4. Stay with them and wait for the convulsion to stop.
5. Most convulsions last less than 5 minutes. If the convulsion lasts for less than 5 minutes, call your GP or NHS Direct to discuss whether your child will need any further treatment for their fever.

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6. Call 999 for an ambulance if:

- The convulsion lasts for more than 5 minutes.
- It is the child's first convulsion.
- The child has several convulsions in a short space of time, even if they each last less than 5 minutes.

Once the convulsion stops your child may be confused, sleepy and upset. Reassure them and allow them to sleep.

During a convulsion DO NOT:

- Restrain your child.
- Place anything in your child's mouth.
- Shake or slap your child.

## **When to seek help**

After your child has been discharged from hospital please seek medical advice quickly if your child:

- has another fit
- becomes more unwell
- develops a rash that doesn't disappear with pressure
- has a sunken or bulging fontanelle (soft spot on their head)
- has a dry mouth
- has sunken eyes
- is not producing tears
- still has a fever after 5 days
- is breathless or making extra effort to breathe
- is floppy or drowsy

You should also seek advice if you become more concerned about your child, are worried about looking after them at home or are concerned they are not improving.

If your child was admitted to hospital please contact the ward they were on. If they were not admitted to hospital please contact their GP or NHS Direct on 111. In an emergency take your child to A&E or dial 999 for an ambulance.

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### Contact details

**Priory Ground**  
0121 507 3927

**Lyndon Ground**  
0121 507 3717

**Lyndon 1**  
0121 507 3800

**Paediatric Assessment Unit (City Hospital)**  
0121 507 4019

**NHS Direct**  
111

### Further information

For more information about febrile convulsions and looking after a child who has a high temperature visit:

#### **NHS Direct**

- [www.nhs.uk/conditions/febrile-convulsions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/febrile-convulsions)
- [www.nhs.uk/conditions/feverchildren](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/feverchildren)
- [www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/treating-high-temperature-children](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/treating-high-temperature-children)

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com), follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

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### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Patient UK Professional Reference, 'Febrile Convulsions', June 2013
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, CG160 'Feverish illness in children – Assessment and initial management in children younger than 5 years', May 2013
- Community Practitioner, 'Clinical update: Febrile convulsion in childhood', July 2012
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Clinical Knowledge Summaries, 'Febrile seizure', June 2008

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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